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SUBJECT: IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY THIS WINTER IN AFGHANISTAN

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11. SUMMARY: Although 2009 saw the largest harvest in Afghanistan in 30 years, food insecurity continues to affect approximately one-third of rural households, with an additional 30% facing periodic food security problems. The lack of purchasing power is now the primary cause of food insecurity, not the absence food. According to USAID's Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS-NET), supply has improved significantly following the historic wheat harvest, a 50% decrease in wheat prices, and generous food aid distribution. USAID's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture (AVIPA) program increased the availability of essential inputs during the 2009 winter wheat planting season, improving the quality and increasing the quantity of the harvest. The expansion of cultivated land by 1 million hectares in 2008/2009 (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) statistics) has also been a factor. Despite this progress, food insecurity among vulnerable populations is on the rise as winter 2009/2010 approaches. Food insecurity will be most pronounced in remote regions, larger cities, flood-affected areas, and among internally displaced persons (IDPs). USG efforts targeting these populations are expected to assist them in meeting their food needs this winter. The USG will continue to monitor the situation closely. END SUMMARY.

12. Harsh winter weather will affect Afghanistan very soon; we have put together this summary for Washington agencies of USAID-supported food security programs. These include: support to the World Food Program (WFP), Protracted Relief & Recovery Operation (PRRO), a Food for Peace (FFP) Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) implemented by World Vision, support to the FEWS-NET and preparing to address unforeseen events.

ONGOING EFFORTS

13. The World Food Program (WFP) provides assistance to Afghanistan through a combination of relief and recovery activities. Projects are implemented in partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), other UN agencies, Community Development Councils (CDCs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Through this program, the USG provided 157,520 metric tons (MTs) of wheat, valued at \$167 million in FY 2008, and 62,190 MTs of wheat, valued at \$60 million in FY 2009. In response to a joint GIROA and United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) appeal, the USG provided an additional 85,000 MTs, valued at \$90 million, in assistance specifically for winterization planning and pre-positioning of food commodities for the 2009/2010 winter. As of October 20, 80% of the commodities had been pre-positioned for accessibility in the winter months in 19 targeted provinces throughout Afghanistan, including those considered to be most food insecure. WFP anticipates completing 100% of pre-positioning by

mid-November, thus mitigating the hunger season in Afghanistan that lasts from approximately November through late April every year.

¶4. The Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) in Ghor province, implemented by World Vision (WV) with USAID support, seeks to reduce food insecurity by improving food utilization and increasing household resiliency to shocks. The program specifically targets children under five with an emphasis on children under 24 months of age and pregnant and lactating women. During the life of this three-year program, WV will distribute over \$33 million in food commodities to vulnerable groups. In addition to their ongoing program, WV will allocate resources to populations affected by shocks, including natural disasters, political conflicts, and those who have been internally displaced. The WV support will ensure that vulnerable populations do not continue to backslide during the winter months when livelihood opportunities are minimal. In consultation with USAID, WV will distribute a four-month ration of yellow peas, oil, and rice and wheat flour directly to program participants (52,000 beneficiaries) prior to the start of hunger season when roads become impassable due to snow. The ration will cover the entirety of the hunger season, with WV resuming planned distribution in March 2010. As household food stocks are at their lowest level during November-April, it is unlikely that the commodities will appear on the market.

¶5. The Cash-For-Work and Voucher Program in Bamyan, Ghor, and Hirat Provinces, implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) with USAID support, targets 23,000 vulnerable families (138,000 individuals) affected by successive shocks including drought, floods, high food prices, and severe winter conditions, which combined, have severely eroded assets and coping mechanisms. By generating household income, vulnerable family access to immediate basic needs during the upcoming winter period will be improved.

¶6. FEWS-NET is vital in providing weather and food security

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information for Afghanistan, and has been critical in identifying vulnerable populations and mitigating the effects of shocks. FEWS-NET regularly undertakes essential monitoring and food security assessments to inform decision-makers throughout the winter. Monthly reports provide critical data on food commodity prices and the current food security situation. Weekly reports provide data on weather forecasts. The most recent Food Security Update for Afghanistan highlights needs in chronically food insecure zones which are characterized by challenging climatic conditions and inaccessibility, in addition to major cities, and areas affected by floods and/or with war-related IDPs. USAID shares information concerning these vulnerable populations its partners and GIROA and adjusts programming to prevent further deterioration during the hunger season.

COMMENT

¶7. USAID efforts to prevent and mitigate Afghan hunger through programs with GIROA, international bodies and NGOs support MAIL's National Agriculture Development Framework through capacity building with GIROA national and provincial staff. In addition to working with MAIL and the Ministry of Public Health, the programs partner with the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, with direct links to the U.S. Agriculture Assistance Strategy for Afghanistan to increase the MAIL's service delivery. The activities work together to provide food security and support the counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy in strengthening the GIROA's legitimacy, and by securing vulnerable populations that might otherwise be at risk of being recruited by the insurgents.

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